GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:353
ANSWERED ON:21.03.2001
TIES WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES
RAM SHAKAL

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the efforts being made to strengthen relations with our neighbours particularly SAARC countries ;

(b) whether fresh policy initiatives are likely to be taken by the government in order to strengthen ties with the neighboring countries ;

(c) if so, details thereof ; and

(d) the number of agencies set up for promoting India`s relations with various countries and their achievements so far ?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH)

(a) to (d) A Statement is placed on the Table of the House.

Statement referred to in Parts (a) to (d) of the answer to Lok Sabha Starred Question No.353 To be answered on 21.03.2001

(a) to (d)
(i) India`s foreign policy is directed towards promoting an external network of peaceful and friendly relations. Central to this objective is the pursuit of a policy of sustaining and strengthening relations with all our neighbours. India is committed to working together with all countries of its extended neighborhood on the basis of mutual goodwill and respect. In the process, India has been contributing significantly towards fulfillment of the aspirations of the peoples of our region. With the exception of Pakistan, our ties with all neighbors have continued to grow in substance and scope.

(ii) The process of developing and deepening relations with our neighbours in SAARC countries is pursued through a multi-facted approach. A regular dialogue is maintained both at the political and official levels to strengthen understanding, address problems peacefully through discussions and enhance bilateral cooperation. Special attention is paid to promoting mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation both bilaterally and at the regional level. Our development assistance is helping to build infrastructure in many neighbouring countries and also to develop human resources, particularly in the fields of education and health. At the popular level we seek to build understanding and friendship through fostering intellectual, academic and cultural exchanges, including through the provision of scholarships in a large number of disciplines.

(iii) Under the umbrella of SAARC, regional cooperation, initiatives are being pursued in theareas of trade liberalisation, protection of the environment, agriculture and rural development, science and technology, education and social welfare. While the SAARC Summit had to be postponed on account of the disquiet over the military coup in Pakistan, technical and functional cooperation is continuing. Technical Committees in a variety of fields have continued to meet and we have agreed that a Meeting of the Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries could be scheduled by the end of May in consultation with Member-States. BIMSTEC is another forum in which India is pursuing economic cooperation with the countries adjoining the Bay of Bengal, namely Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

(iv) Relations between India and its neighbours, with the exception of Pakistan, are dynamic and constantly developing. They are based on our historical links, mutual trust and confidence. The added emphasis now is to provide greater economic content to our relations, striving to optimize the mutual benefits for the peoples of the region.